

# Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Professional Development

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## Purpose of Presentation

To provide a brief overview of emerging issues in early childhood professional development (ECPD):

1. Changing conceptualization of ECPD
2. Need for work focusing explicitly on quality of higher education and training
3. Need for common definitions
4. The missing methods subsection in research on on-site individualized ECPD
5. Need for research at the program and systems as well as classroom levels

# 1. Changing Conceptualization

This section based on:

Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T. & Starr, R. (2010). Professional development for early educators: Reviewing and revising conceptualizations. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.) (2010), *Handbook of early literacy research, volume 3* (pp. 425-434). New York: Guilford Publications.

## Components of ECPD

### **Knowledge-Focused**

ECPD:

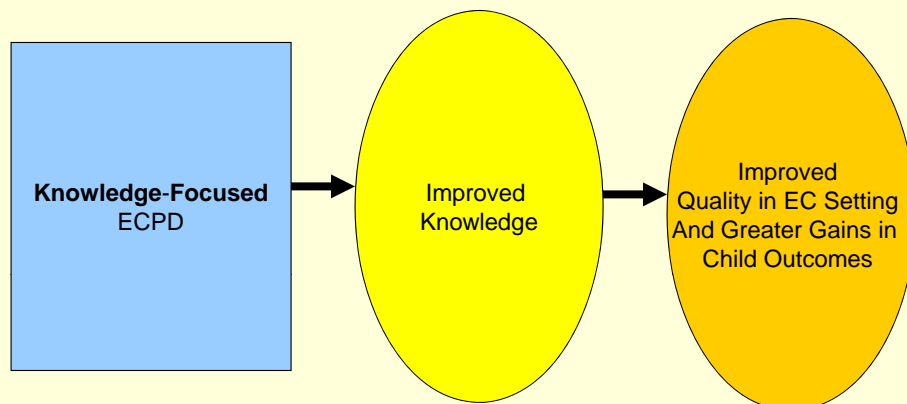
- Coursework contributing to a degree
- Training

## Components of ECPD

### **Practice-Focused ECPD:**

- Individualized
- Interactive
- Observing, modeling, reflecting and discussing, providing feedback
- On-site or via internet link

## Traditional Conceptualization



## Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

- Reviews of research from previous decades have reported that educational attainment of teachers is associated with quality and child outcomes.
- However, a reexamination of this issue with data from pre-k settings in multiple states did not find the expected pattern (NCEDL study data; Early et al., 2006).
- To provide a careful examination of this issue, coordinated analyses were conducted in 7 major early childhood datasets (Early et al. 2007). This research found little evidence of an association of observed quality or of child outcomes with:
  - The lead teacher's educational attainment
  - Whether the lead teacher had a bachelors' degree
  - The major of the lead teacher's highest educational degree

## Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

There are multiple possible interpretations of this pattern (summarized in Burchinal, Hyson & Zaslow, 2008)

- The quality of the higher education programs was not specified in these analyses. There are indications of wide variation. Quality might have functioned as a moderator
- Cohort effects: There may be differences over time in the characteristics of the early educators with higher educational attainment who remain in EC classrooms
- There may be problems with the underlying conceptualization: It may fail to capture adequately how ECPD contributes to quality or child outcomes

## Questioning the Traditional Conceptualization

Further evidence of the need to question the traditional conceptualization comes from a study by Neuman and Cunningham (2009). They randomly assigned EC educators to receive:

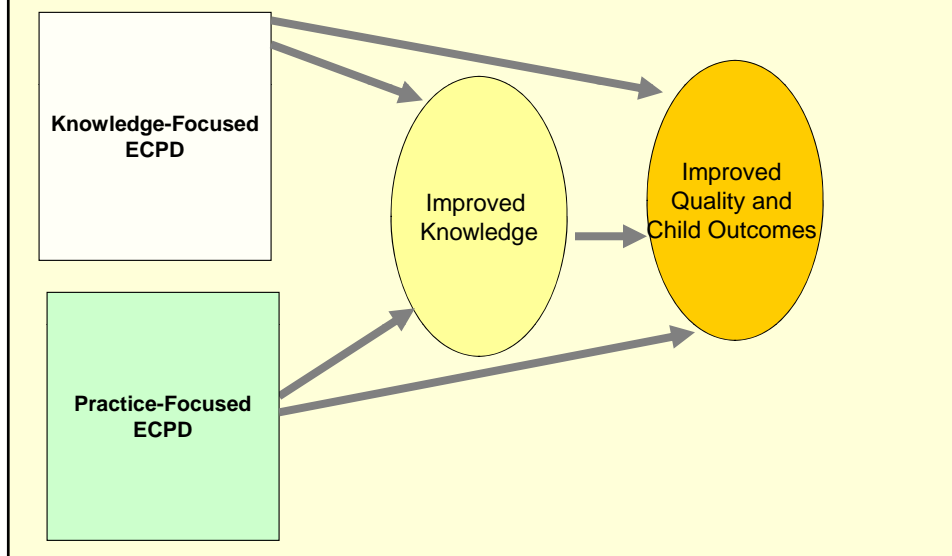
- A college course built around the most recent research on early language and literacy development
  - The college course paired with on-site coaching
  - A control group (PD as usual)
- There were no effects of either treatment approach on early educator knowledge regarding language and literacy
  - There were also no effects on the quality of the early education environment for the treatment group that received only the college coursework
  - However there were large and educationally meaningful improvements in language and literacy stimulation in classrooms and home-based early childhood settings when coursework was combined with on-site coaching.

## Emerging Conceptualizations

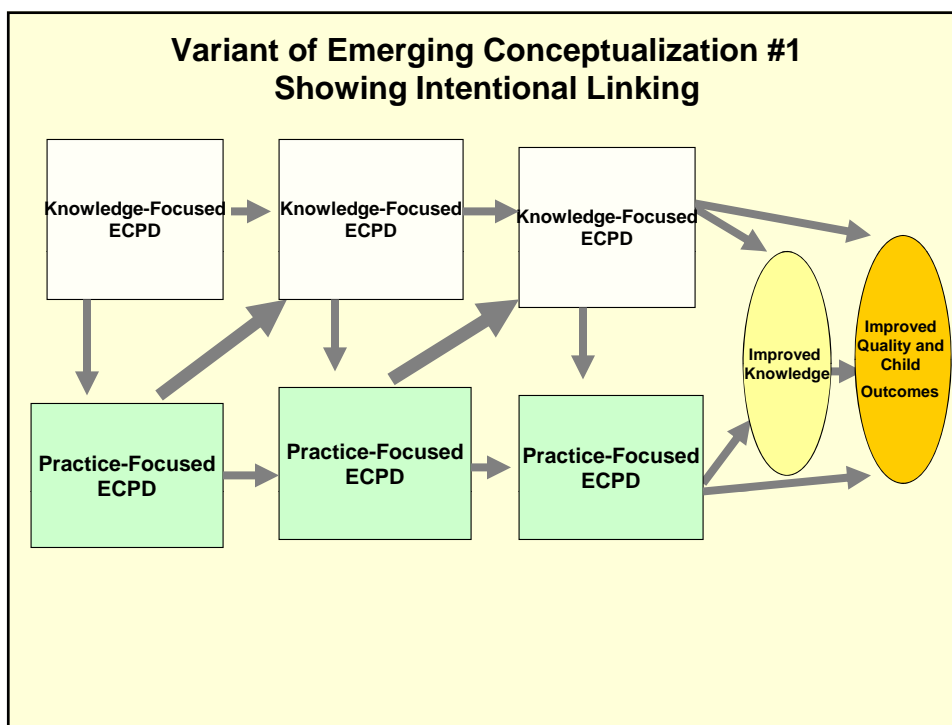
Three emerging conceptualizations change the placement in the model of the knowledge-focused component:

- #1: systematically pairs practice-focused and knowledge-focused components
- #2: places the primary emphasis on the practice-focused PD
- #3: Views changes in knowledge as deriving from rather than preceding changes in practice

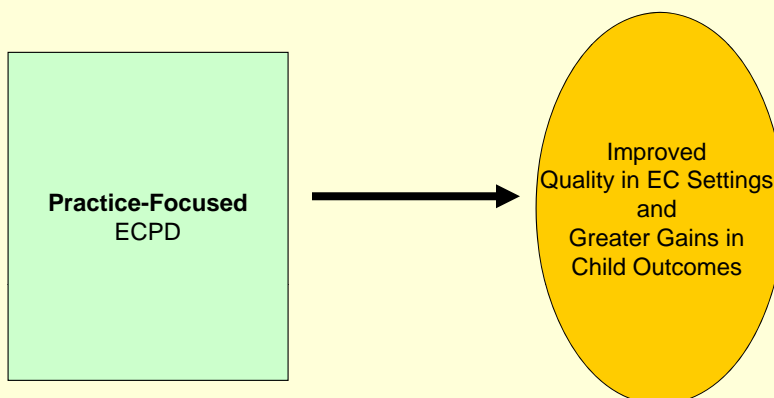
## Emerging Conceptualization #1: Pairing Components



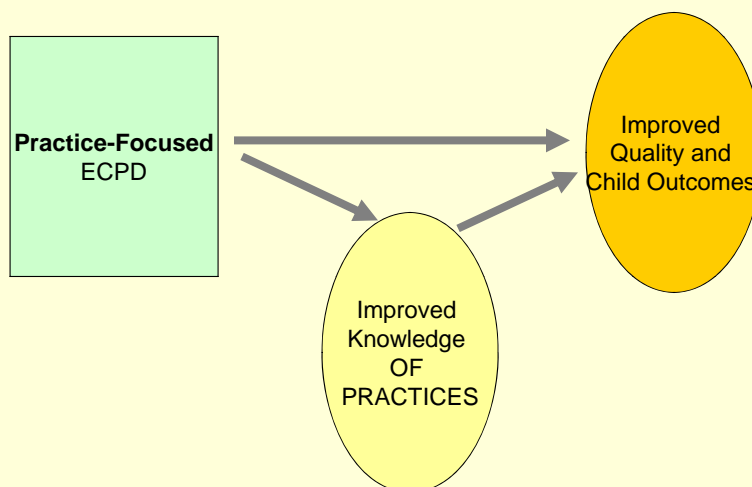
## Variant of Emerging Conceptualization #1 Showing Intentional Linking



**Emerging Conceptualization #2:  
Primary Emphasis on Practice-Focused Component**



**Emerging Conceptualization #3:  
Knowledge Deriving from Awareness of Practices**



## 2. Quality in Higher Education and Training

This section is based primarily on:

Burchinal, M., Hyson, M, & Zaslow (2008).  
Competence and credentials for early childhood educators: What do we know and what do we need to know. *Head Start Dialog*, 11(1).

## Issues Facing Higher Education Programs

- Increase in demand for teacher preparation with growth in pre-k and increasing requirements for Head Start teachers.
- Concern that many higher education programs are small, have limited resources, have had different target groups in the past.
- To explore these issues in greater depth, Hyson, Tomlinson and Morris (2009) conducted a national survey of directors of higher education ECPD programs
  - Random sample of about half of 1,126 higher education programs for early educators
  - Response rate of 45%; half from programs accredited by NCATE and NAEYC



## Issues Facing Higher Education Programs

- Survey pointed to both positive efforts and areas of concern
- Positive efforts included:
  - Use of national and state standards in determining coursework and fieldwork
  - Priority placed on helping students implement quality curricula effectively

## Issues Facing Higher Education Programs

- Areas of concern included:
  - Only 37% of directors cited as a top priority teaching students to engage more frequently in developmentally supportive teacher-child interactions
  - Only 29% listed as a top priority helping students know about and use research in their practice
  - Programs often reported capacity issues, such as needing more faculty, having primarily part-time faculty, needing more professional development for faculty, having heavy/overwhelming course loads

## Need for Research Focusing on Higher Education Quality

- We have an established approach to reviewing higher education programs in early childhood for quality
  - NCATE-NAEYC Accreditation
- Opportunity for research on:
  - characteristics of those who pursue degrees in accredited vs. non accredited programs
  - teacher practice among those who have and have not graduated from accredited programs, taking into account initial characteristics

## Parallel Issues for Training

- State and national efforts to provide standards of quality for training that occurs outside of institutions of higher education
- Examples include:
  - credentialing of trainers;
  - accreditation of resource and referral agencies;
  - alignment of training with state early learning standards;
  - acknowledgment of key difference between single session workshop and intentionally sequenced series
- Need for research on whether outcomes of training differ when such steps have been taken

## Connecting Changing Conceptualizations With Higher Education Approaches

While much of higher education coursework in the past has been built around the traditional conceptualization of ECPD, we have an important opportunity to build into higher education the emerging conceptualizations that focus directly on practice

The most recent research (e.g., by Hamre, Pianta and colleagues) suggests that higher education coursework can:

- (1) Systematically build in practice-focused components
- (2) Intentionally link knowledge-focused and practice-focused components
- (3) View knowledge as rooted in and deriving from practice
- (4) Build in requirements for measurement of change in practice in addition to testing knowledge

We need systematic evaluations of such higher education approaches

## Implications of Changing Conceptualization for Training

- We need to think about ways to formally recognize and provide “credit” for participation in on-site individualized PD
  - Consider how participating in on-site individualized PD could fulfill in-service requirements
  - Consider how participating in on-site individualized PD could be recognized as part of PD in such systems as QRIS

### 3. Need for Common Definitions

This section is based primarily on:

NAEYC-NACCRRA work towards developing common definitions for practice-focused ECPD (draft in binder)

### Lack of Common Terminology

- If we are to build a body of work on practice-focused PD, will need to use common definitions and terminology
- Yet terms are frequently used in overlapping and imprecise ways
- Lack of clear differentiation among:
  - Technical Assistance
  - Consultation
  - Mentoring
  - Coaching

## Towards Common Definitions

- NAEYC-NACCRRA work towards common definitions proposes key distinctions among these
- See full definitions in draft in binder
- Some of the key differences proposed in the NAEYC-NACCRRA definitions focus on roles and goals. For example:
  - Mentoring is provided by someone more senior in same role, working over period of time to guide overall professional development of early educator
  - Coaching is provided by an expert working with early educator on implementing specific practices
  - Consultation involves joint problem solving focusing on a specific issue

## 4. The Missing Methods Section

- This section is based on:

Tout, K., Halle, T., Zaslow, M. & Starr, R. (2009). *Evaluation of the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program: Final Report*. Prepared for the Policy and Program Studies Service, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education, Washington, DC.

## The Missing Methods Section

- If we are to build a body of work focusing on practice-focused PD, we will need provide more detail about specific features
- At present, detail is often lacking in reports and publications.
- We often read in research reports and journal articles only that there was initial training accompanied by on-site coaching (or mentoring or consultation)

## Examples of Features That Should Be Specified

Staff providing the PD

- Qualifications
- Preparation the staff received on specific model

Approach or model

- Whether goal is broad quality improvement, improvement in specific domain, implementation of a curriculum with fidelity
- Whether goals for each session are predetermined or determined jointly

## Examples of Features That Should Be Specified

Coordination with coursework or training

- Whether practice-focused PD is sequenced or interspersed with coursework or training
- Whether these are provided by same staff or there is some form of coordination across staff
- Tightness of alignment of group and individual sessions; feedback loops

Dosage

- How often on-site work occurs
- How long each session lasts
- Over what duration

## Examples of Features That Should Be Specified

How progress is documented

- Whether documentation of each session occurs
- Whether supervisor periodically observes on-site work
- Whether and which observational measure is used to document progress

## 5. Levels of Practice-Focused ECPD

This section is based primarily on:

Isner, T., Tout, K., Zaslow, M., Soli, M., Rothenberg, K. & Burkhauser, M. (2010). Coaching in early childhood education programs and quality rating and improvement systems. Report prepared for Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County.

Zaslow, M., Tout, K. & Isner, T (March 2011). On site quality improvement approaches in early childhood setting. Plenary address at BUILD Conference.

## Levels of Practice-Focused PD

Levels at which practice-focused PD may be addressed:

- To improve quality in classroom or group
- To improve quality of program as a whole
- To create a system of quality improvement



## Levels of Practice-Focused PD

- Most of research has focused on first level of quality improvement: aimed at classroom or group
- Sufficient body of evaluation research at this level that it is possible to summarize in literature review format
- Literature review of evidence at classroom or home group level conducted by Isner and colleagues concluded that:
  - Evidence is promising but it is important to note that not every evaluation shows evidence of effects on quality or child outcomes
  - With lack of specification of features in studies of on-site practice focused PD, cannot yet distinguish between features of programs that do and do not show positive effects

## Levels of Practice-Focused PD

- Yet much of this work has been occurring at program level and at level aimed at establishing or refining systems
  - Especially with expansion of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)
- Research on program level practice-focused PD is limited
  - Two recent descriptive studies
- Research at systems level also quite limited
  - One evaluation study (focusing on all three levels but with important implications for systems level)
  - Can draw important guidance from implementation science

## Research at the Program Level

Smith, Schneider and Kreader (2010)  
conducted a study to describe quality improvement approaches in 17 states with statewide QRIS

- Involved interviews with state level administrators of the QRIS and those leading its quality improvement approaches

## Research at the Program Level

- Types of assistance provided in these quality improvement approaches:
  - Talking to teachers about how to improve environments, activities, routines: reported as frequent by 82%
  - Talking to directors: reported as frequent by 82%
  - Observing and providing feedback: reported as frequent by 59%
  - Modeling: reported as frequent by 35%
- Frequency of assistance when provided on-site
  - 59% reported monthly or less than monthly
- Formal guide used by less than half the states to guide quality improvement (41%)
- Limited focus on improving environments to support literacy or math. Tendency to focus on global quality.

## Research at the Program Level

“These findings suggest that certain characteristics of on-site quality assistance found in models that have demonstrated efficacy are not yet highly prevalent in QRIS-aligned quality improvement activities.”

- Low frequency of visits
- Need for both observation and modeling
- Limited focus on supporting learning in specific domains
- Limited use of a formal guide

## Research at the Program Level

- Isner, Tout, Zaslow et al. (2011)
  - Conducted a study coordinated with and aiming to complement study by Smith and colleagues
  - Whereas Smith and colleagues focused on statewide QRIS, this work involved case studies in four QRIS that are not statewide
  - Interviews conducted in each site with director of quality improvement, director(s) of contracted coaching, groups of coaches.

## Research at the Program Level

- As in study by Smith et al, found different phases of QRIS on site quality improvement: Preparing for the rating, facilitating the rating process, and following up on rating to improve it
- Development of a quality improvement plan a central activity in all four sites
- Focus on environmental rating scales and implementation of a specific curriculum
- Tendency to begin with quick technical fixes and then go on to more in-depth work

## Research at the Program Level

- Sites referred to Wesley and Bussye book on consultation or PFI in discussing models
- Yet most did not have a manual or set of materials to guide coaches in their daily practice
- In two sites, coaches worked with directors, while in two with teachers
  - Along with research by Smith et al., emerging issue of coaching with directors
- Variation in duration of coaching, from a few months to indefinitely. Also variation in intensity.

## Research at the Program Level

- While support readily available to coaches in each of the sites, formal supervision happened much less frequently.
  - Only two sites had direct observations of coaching
  - Written feedback was provided only rarely
  - Only one of four sites tracked fidelity of implementation of a model
  - Supervisors had multiple responsibilities; not just oversight of coaches
- In most sites, there were multiple visitors to programs for different reasons. Challenge of coordinating multiple visitors and sources of input

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

Research focusing on systems level issues is only beginning to emerge

- Evaluation of a QRIS coaching approach in Washington State: Seeds to Success (Boller, Blair, Del Grosso & Paulsell, 2010)
- Randomized control trial of coaching approach within QRIS
- Focus here on systems level implications of the research. Research focused at all three levels.

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

- Found significant and substantial improvements in observed quality at level of classroom or group
- Did not find overall improvements in QRIS ratings for PD.
  - Length of time needed to reach higher levels of educational attainment an issue
- Underscores importance of creating incentives for participation in coaching, both in terms of PD recognition and program quality recognition, when progress is made

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

- Tout, Isner & Zaslow (2011) recommend drawing upon implementation science as a resource in moving forward with research that can inform systems level issues.
- Implementation science calls attention to the fact that even when a model demonstrated to be effective is chosen, implementation issues can prevent seeing the effects anticipated based on demonstration study.
  - This is especially the case when there is system-wide implementation of a model

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

- System-wide implementation has particular challenges.
- Factors that can affect fidelity in system-wide implementation:
  - Staff recruitment and retention
  - Pre-service training
  - Support and supervision of staff
  - Staff performance evaluation
  - Program evaluation and data systems
  - Administrative structures
  - Systems level partnerships

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

- Implementation of home visiting programs at the state level through health care reform is providing an important exemplar of a process for both identifying and implementing evidence-based practice at a systems level
- See:
 

Paulsell, D., Avellar, S., Sama Martin, E., & Del Grosso, P. (2010). *Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness Review: Executive Summary*. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC. <http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>

## Towards Research at a Systems Level

- Is there a potential to use such an approach in identifying and implementing effective ECPD approaches?
- System-wide implementation of evidence-based PD practices, in turn, would provide an important opportunity for research at a systems level.